

Public Health Week: Marketing the Concept of Public Health

CASWELL A. EVANS, Jr., DDS, MPH
LIA A. MARGOLIS

Dr. Evans is Director, Public Health Programs and Services, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. Ms. Margolis is Director of the Planning Division.

Tearsheet requests to Dr. Evans, 313 North Figueroa St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Synopsis

The Public Health Programs and Services (PHP&S) Branch of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services began a strategic planning effort in January 1986 to meet new disease trends, curb rising health care costs, consolidate limited resources, and handle shifting demographics. A strategic plan was designed to assess the opportunities and challenges facing the agency over a 5-year horizon. Priority areas were recognized, and seven strategic directives were formulated to guide PHP&S in expanding public health services to a changing community.

Health promotion was acknowledged as a critical target of the strategic planning process. Among the most significant results of the health promotion directive was the establishment of an annual Public Health Week in Los Angeles County. Beginning in 1988, 1 week per year was selected to enhance the community's awareness of public health programs and the leadership role PHP&S plays in providing these programs to nearly 9 million residents of Los Angeles County. Events in Public Health Week include a professional lecture series and the honoring of an outstanding public health activist and a media personality who has fostered health promotion. Other free community activities such as mobile clinics, screenings, and health fairs are held throughout the county.

With intensive media coverage of Public Health Week, PHP&S has been aggressive in promoting its own services and accomplishments while also educating the community on vital wellness issues. The strategic methodology employed by PHP&S, with its emphasis on long-range proactive planning, is receiving national recognition and could be adopted by similar agencies wishing to enhance their image and develop unique health promotion projects in their communities.

To meet new disease trends, curb rising health care costs, consolidate limited resources, and handle shifting demographics, the Public Health Programs and Services (PHP&S) Branch of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS) began in January 1986 a strategic planning process designed to address these issues. A PHP&S plan was developed to assess the external opportunities and challenges facing the DHS over a 5-year period and to analyze the internal capabilities of PHP&S to meet this future. Seven strategic directives were formulated to guide PHP&S in expanding public health services to a changing community in priority areas. Acknowledging the critical significance of providing health education and cost efficient disease prevention services to the public, PHP&S identified health promotion as one of the seven priority areas of the strategic plan.

To develop and implement a health promotion program that would provide the greatest effect and

insight into community needs, a multi-disciplined steering committee of key PHP&S and private sector staff members and six subcommittees of departmental employees were formed. Together the two groups coordinated the planning details in the vital areas of child health, adolescent pregnancy, substance abuse, senior health, chronic disease, and nutrition. In planning activities that PHP&S staff members would embark on in addressing these areas, the groups identified the need for greater community involvement and awareness of the many public health services provided by PHP&S. Among the community outreach marketing activities of the health promotion program was initiating the annual countywide Public Health Week celebration.

Public Health Week Celebration

Public Health Week is a uniquely enlightening and educational event for Los Angeles County

residents, community members, professional administrators, service organizations, legislators, and DHS employees. Public Health Week is an extensive community outreach effort, featuring an array of open houses, tours, displays, video presentations, disease screenings, mobile immunization clinics, trivia games, health fairs, smoking cessation programs, and contests involving children, in addition to a lecture series. Public Health Week in Los Angeles County is the first event of its kind in the United States and in 1989 was awarded the J. Howard Beard Certificate of Merit from the National Association of County Health Officials and the Los Angeles County Productivity Award.

The primary goal of the annual celebration is to promote community wellness and the benefits of preventive behavior in an entertaining and informal educational forum. Public Health Week allows the general public and health care professionals to improve their understanding of, and appreciation for, the vital impact public health has on shaping a healthier future for community residents. Further, Public Health Week provides a multi-faceted spotlight on the significant contributions of PHP&S to Los Angeles County residents.

Planning Committee Structure

To attain the goal of promoting healthy lifestyles to the largest number of persons, a three-tiered committee responsible for coordinating, planning, implementing, and promoting Public Health Week activities was formed. The committee structure consists of

1. a steering committee composed of PHP&S executive managers, past and present Public Health Week planning committee chairpersons, a representative of the departmental public relations staff, and representatives of three influential community agencies that contribute time in program planning and financial support,
2. a planning committee composed of departmental employees from various program offices and health facilities, and
3. seven planning subcommittees that include planning committee members, additional departmental employees, and representatives of community agencies and advisory groups.

The steering committee spearheads the entire event, promoting it at the local, regional, and national level, securing community sponsorship, and providing direction to the planning committee

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chairperson who, in turn, directs the activities of the planning committee and its subcommittees. The seven planning subcommittees on awards and opening ceremonies, community agency coordination, finance, governmental relations, program-network activities, publicity, and reception are then responsible for pulling together other departmental employees, community agencies, and residents to coordinate Public Health Week activities county-wide.

Funding Public Health Week

Direct or in-kind donations in support of Public Health Week are received from more than 150 community agencies. There are long-term benefactors strongly committed to the concept of the week-long observance. The size of the donations dictates the size of the program. An awards luncheon as part of the week's activities also raises funds through the sale of tickets. The donations are used to fund extraordinary outreach activities and such expenses as airfare and accommodations for plenary session speakers. The luncheon proceeds are used partly to fund the following year's events. Most activities held throughout the week require little or no additional funding. As an example, opening ceremonies are held in a State museum where lunch room and auditorium fees are waived.

Tangible Benefits

Public Health Week has become a new and valued "tradition" in Los Angeles County. The annual proclamation of this event by the County Board of Supervisors initiates a unique and exciting PHP&S effort to meet the marketing and program promotion challenges faced by the DHS. The coordinated coverage of this event through comprehensive television reports, newspaper articles, and public service radio announcements also serves as an active marketing strategy by PHP&S to promote its achievements and programs in a positive and controlled manner to the public. This aggressive marketing strategy demonstrated during Public

Health Week planning is critical for the successful promotion of this event.

PHP&S delivers its health promotion message directly to the county's residents at numerous sites throughout the county, ensuring that a large number of persons and groups, including grade school children, high-risk adolescents, senior citizens, indigents, families, and hard-to-reach groups may all have a chance to participate in the celebration and increase awareness of healthy lifestyles.

In addition to providing public health services to the community, Public Health Week activities include nationally recognized leaders in public health. Each year since 1988, the president of the American Public Health Association has addressed the opening plenary session. In addition, such national leaders as Dr. David Hayes-Bautista, Director, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Dr. Lester Breslow, Dean Emeritus, UCLA School of Public Health, Dr. William Foege, Executive Director of the Carter Center of Emory University, and Dr. George Pickett, Commissioner of Health, Nassau County, NY, Health Department, have delivered keynote addresses during Public Health Week opening ceremonies.

The event also serves as a forum for honoring one of the country's outstanding public health activists and for recognizing a local personality who has used the mass media to educate the community and strengthen the public health network of support. It's also an opportunity to raise funds for various PHP&S health promotion projects. Beyond that, physicians, nurses, nutritionists, social workers, and other professionals attending Public Health Week programs can earn continuing education units.

Public Health Week 1992

Planning is currently underway as Public Health Week approaches its fifth year. The number of employees volunteering to coordinate the project has increased substantially from previous years as enthusiasm for the event grows. Public Health Week 1992 will be celebrated in Los Angeles County during the week of April 6 and will build on the strengths and lessons of past events. Each of PHP&S' 46 health centers and all program offices have been encouraged to coordinate at least one activity for the community during Public Health Week 1992. Additionally, community health agencies will be taking more of their health education and disease prevention services directly to the community in an effort to reach the majority of the county's residents.

Call to Action

Since the Public Health Week concept can be adopted easily in other areas, State and local health agencies are encouraged to establish similar events in their jurisdictions. The Southern California Public Health Association has sponsored a regional workshop on Public Health Week to inspire agencies to promote such events. Public Health Week officials have recommended to the director of the California Department of Health Services that a statewide activity be planned for 1993. National leaders should consider the merits of joining in a celebration of Public Health Week starting in 1993.

Additional information regarding Public Health Week may be obtained from Ms. Margolis, telephone (213) 744-6276.